Chief Says FBI Has Informants 'Connected With News Media'

Post 9/27/78 Associated Press

FBI Director William H. Webster told a Senate subcommittee yesterday the agency has "about four informants who are connected with the news media in various ways."

Webster made the statement in testimony supporting a proposed congressional charter for the FBI. He urged that the charter not be so detailed as to restrict the government's response to violations of the law.

Also, Congress should decide whether the FBI should continue collecting information about planned demonstrations at federal facilities and making background checks on prospective government employes, he said.

Attorney General Griffin B. Bell expressed hope that Congress would not merely "write out a code of laws saying we can't do this and that," but would spell out the FBI's powers affirmatively so agents would know what they could legally do.

Sen. James Abourezk (D-S.D.), chairman of the Judiciary subcommittee on administrative practice and procedure, brought up the question of informants. He asked Webster whether the charter should restrict the use of journalists, doctors, clergymen and others whose professions make them privy to confidential information.

Webster said there was no "clear agreement" on this within the FBI, which he said is preparing its own charter proposal and expects to turn it over to Bell and to Abourezk in a week or two.

The FBI director did not indicate what connection the informants he mentioned had with the news media. He said, "We have been careful not to use them in any way connected with editorial policy."

Pressed by Abourezk, Webster said he would prefer that the charter "not say flat out that you can't use clergymen or newspapermen" or members of other professions. Bell also said he "wouldn't want a blanket prohibition."